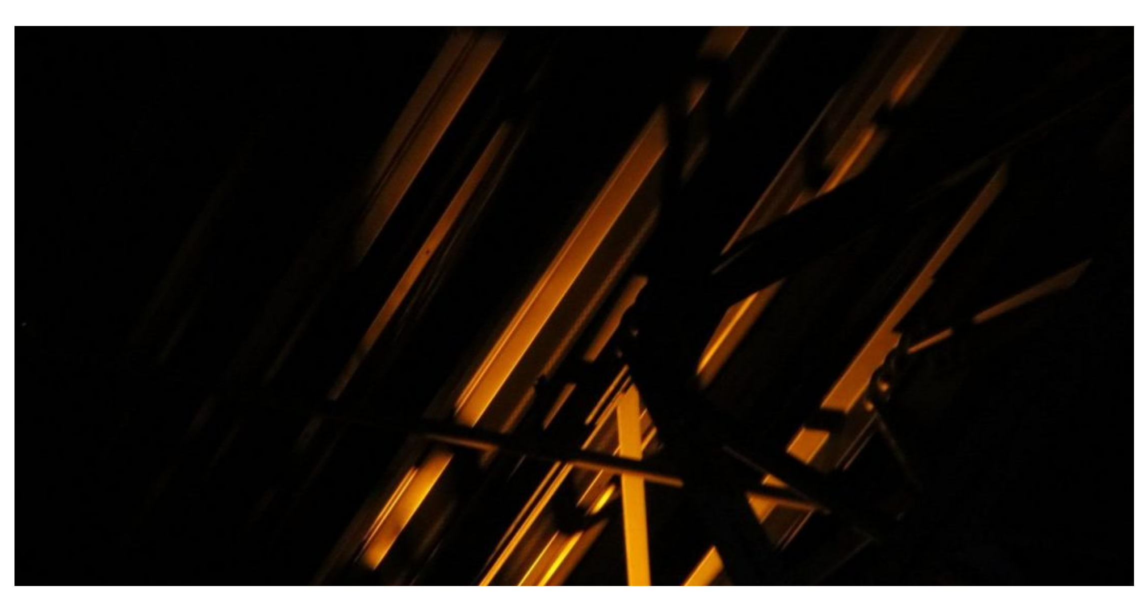






KEITH TILFORD 2018-11-27

THE HOOKS BENEATH THE BAIT / ENTRAPMENT AND ESCAPE IN ALTHUSSER AND ART

GENERICSCIENCE ALTHUSSER, ART, CLASS STRUGGLE IN THEORY, CONTROL, METIS, NON-PHILOSOPHY

Francois Matheron has suggested that the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of providing a comprehensive assessment to the work of Louis Althusser results from the 'generalized uncertainty' of an oeuvre constructed in the "dimension of catastrophe" and designed by its author to be "forever destroying itself". This paper allows itself to fall into the trap — advised against by Warren Montag, because it would fail to recognize the "combined and uneven development" within his oeuvre — of treating Althusser's later writings on 'aleatory materialism'
as containing 'double truths' or the esoteric secret and key to what he had been writing about all along. An apparently common mistake among enchanted readers, it is here made deliberately if only to install the analysis in an altogether different territory: that of the unavoidability of traps themselves. Therefore, a back-track through Althusser's 'theoretical mischief' is required that positions itself decidedly against certain critical perspectives that have sought to delegitimize his philosophical project on the basis of its operation through the deployment of ruses and deception.

Neither a comprehensive assessment nor a captivated mysticism, and not exactly the projection of Althusser's own form of 'symptomatic reading', what is offered instead—to borrow a term he adopted from Lacan in For Marx—is a 'scan' of its 'nodes, references, and shifts'. This paper wagers on a reversal of perspective away from his suture of philosophy and politics that might expose the 'affinity' and 'complementarity' of an encounter between his oeuvre and the Greek 'mental category' of mêtic intelligence. Neglected in the history of Western thought but arguably first retrieved from cultural amnesia by Jean-Pierre Vernant and Marcel Detienne in their 1974 book Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society, and currently being theorized as a technological vector by Ben Singleton, mêtis is said to occupy many different levels of human (and animal) intelligence, from the solving of enigmas and riddles, the skills of a carpenter, the navigation of ships at sea, to ruses, tricks, and deceits of all kind. Yet it rarely appears on the surface of texts or things but is rather set in an 'off stage'
or 'backstage' within the world, and according to Detienne and Vernant, "must be tracked down elsewhere, in areas which the philosopher usually passes over in silence or mentions only with irony or with hostility". If for Althusser philosophy was the "pertinent index"
from which´to wage the struggle of 'class war in theory', it will be established that mêtis is the pertinent index from which to

analyze and evaluate the practical effectiveness of his methodology or give any robust account of the cognitive technologies and weaponized concepts it made use of. With this in mind, the aim is to extract from mêtic intelligence as a form of rationality complicit with 'inhabiting the trap'
some consequences bearing on the evasion of ideological capture through the practicotheoretic manipulation of forms and materials in political, philosophical, and artistic practices.

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